



Vol. 1, No. 4
Oct. 8, 2001

17th Signal keeps Victory Strike talking

By Pfc. Jon Soucy
29th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

The soldiers of B Company, 17th Signal Battalion, whose job is to provide voice and data communications for V Corps, see their role in Victory Strike II as a vital one, but a role that is only one part of a bigger system.

"Our part here is a small part in a major network that's all throughout both training areas," said Staff Sgt. Shane Layo, a platoon sergeant with the 17th, referring to their role at the Drawsko Pomorski and Wedrzyn training sites.

The network that the 17th has set up can communicate across the world. They do it by setting up a network of node centers, or switching stations, at various places around the training area. There are five node centers set up across Victory Strike II; each processes the communications in the area where they are positioned.

"It's kind of like the old telephone operators, where they would connect your call by plugging a wire into a giant board of connections," said 1st Lt. Peter Dickerman, describing how the nodes work "Only it's a high-tech, computerized version of the telephone operator."

In addition to providing basic telephone communications, the 17th also provides Internet access and video teleconferencing that

allows the command structure to quickly get information to various units in the field.

"We provide the commanders the capability to send out totally secure e-mail, such as operation orders," said Sgt. Mario Harris, a node center team chief with the 17th.

The members of the 17th say they play a vital morale-boosting role as well – one that's even more important in the tense wake of Sept. 11th's terrorist attacks.

"We provide the lines so people can call home to Mom or family members, as well as the Internet access to check e-mail. That keeps morale up," said Layo.

Victory Strike II has been an exercise that also has allowed the unit to more fully train for a combat deployment.

"You're so far from the rear area (in Germany) here that if you forgot something it's tough," said Sgt. Salvatore Scaffidi, a transmissions systems supervisor. "So you have to make sure that you've packed everything that you need, because it's not like in Germany, where if you left something behind you can just drive back and get it."

"Being part of this exercise provides a better training opportunity for us," said Dickerman, a platoon leader in the 17th. "At our usual training site in Germany we can't dig fighting positions. Here we can tear up the ground a little more. It's a lot more realistic," he said.



Photo by Pfc. Jon Soucy
Sgt. Mario Harris and Pfc. Michael Watkins, of B Company, 17th Signal Battalion, run a digital transmissions group test at their node center in Oleszno. The center is one of five that provide voice and data communications just about anywhere in the world.

Signal soldiers test mass casualty skills

By Spc. Robert Barker

29th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The long screams of a horn sounded Friday at the 17th Signal Battalion's headquarters in the Drawsko Pomorski Training Area. Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company knew exactly what the wailing sound meant, and they reacted immediately.

The soldiers donned their protective masks and warned others. "Mass cal! Mass cal!"

Senior NCOs quickly took charge, making sure they knew where each of their soldiers were. Then they called the base cluster command center to report how many of the soldiers were accounted for, missing or injured. A mass casualty exercise, or "mass cal," was underway. The little- or no-warning exercises test a unit's ability to rapidly deal with a large number of injured soldiers.

Unit combat lifesaver-trained soldiers and a designated quick reaction force collected their gear and rushed to begin locating the injured and missing. When they located an injured soldier, they brought him to the casualty collection point where the casualties could be processed and then rushed to hospitals or aid stations, based on their conditions.

Luckily this was just a practice exercise to prepare the soldiers for an air, ground or chemical attack.

"This training is very essential," said Staff Sgt. Johnnie Holmes, the senior sergeant in charge of triage – classifying the "wounded" by the severity of their injuries.



Photo by Spc. Robert Barker

On the run

A litter team from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 17th Signal Battalion, rushes a mock casualty on a litter for triage and treatment during a mass casualty exercise the unit conducted at its site on the Drawsko Pomorski Training Area Oct. 5.

"My prior experience has sent me to Somalia, so I know what a mass casualty experience is like.

"Having people trained and practicing what they know is great. If the ball ever drops, they'll know exactly what to do. When there are casualties, it is not time to think it is time to react.

"Saving another soldier's life is some-

thing that I hope I never have to face, but if (we had to), I feel that I and the rest of the combat lifesavers are up to the task," said Holmes.

"Soldiers love this kind of training," said HHC 1st Sgt. Sherry Wright. "It increases their safety and security levels. They know their fellow soldiers can save lives and be ready at essential moments."

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Maintenance teams can fix just about any helicopter, anywhere in the world

By Sgt. Brent Hunt
V Corps Public Affairs Office

From nose to tail, aircraft participating in Victory Strike II are kept soaring through the sky with the help of an intermediate maintenance team that can fix anything from A to Z on a helicopter, most anywhere in the world.

Companies A and B, 7th Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 3rd Corps Support Command from Illesheim, Germany, can diagnose and repair any component on the Black Hawk, Apache and Chinook helicopters flying in Victory Strike.

"We are the only maintenance company out here supporting the 11th (Aviation Regiment) and the 12th (Aviation Brigade). We are a world-class aviation, intermediate maintenance company. We are enthusiastic and proficient at our jobs," said Staff Sgt. Raquel Patrick, an avionics maintenance supervisor from Co. B.

Maintenance on an aircraft is broken down into three groups. The first level is company level, essentially the crew chief on each individual "bird." The crew chief can do a lot to keep an aircraft in the air, but if he needs outside assistance, the maintenance goes to the second, or intermediate, level. Intermediate-level maintenance teams can fix just about anything on an aircraft, if the aircraft is fixable. The third and final level is when the aircraft can't be fixed on site and is shipped off for repair.

"About the only time it comes to that is (if there's) battlefield damage. Most everything we can handle down at our



Photo by Brent Hunt
Pfcs. Diane Garver (left) and Jeremie Cooper, Apache attack helicopter mechanics from the 7th Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 3rd Corps Support Command in Illesheim, Germany, tighten down the rotor blades of an Apache at the Ziemsko Airfield Oct. 6. The unit is one of two intermediate-level aviation maintenance companies participating in exercise Victory Strike II.

level," said Sgt. Gabe Loftin, an Apache crew chief with the 2nd Squadron, 6th Calvary, 11th Aviation Regiment.

Of the two companies, A Company repairs weapons systems, power train components and hydraulic systems, while B Company gets the rest.

The companies' mission is to repair and maintain aircraft with regularly scheduled maintenance at 400-hour intervals. This means going through the aircraft from top to bottom and making repairs as necessary. They can repair the avionics, radar, navigational and communications systems—even night

vision goggles.

"We repair all the communications devices. When a radio is brought in, we first test and check to see if it is receiving and transmitting. If we find the problem, but we don't have the part, we have a Black Hawk that goes back to Germany for parts. We can have anything fixed within two days," said Sgt. Christie Cross-Tidwell, a communications supervisor with Co. B.

In addition to repairing the aircraft itself, the technicians of A Company take on the weapons systems on the Apaches.

"We test, adjust and align the electrical components, weap-

ons system and Hellfire missiles on the Apaches. We are essentially the armor for the Apache, just on a bigger scale," said Ricky Phan, Co. A armament electrical system supervisor.

While the companies stay pretty busy repairing the American aircraft fighting in Victory Strike II, they also find time to be good ambassadors.

"We even repaired the fuel line on an Italian Huey the other day," said Sgt. Garnet Eye, Co. A's hydraulic shop supervisor. "They couldn't get the part and they didn't have enough time to get it fixed, so they asked us to fix it. So we did."

News clips

A bomb exploded in the Saudi city of Khobar, killing at least one American and wounding several other foreigners. Officials are unclear whether the explosion was related to the Sept. 11 attacks in the U.S.

An explosion rocked a rural area in northern Israel early Sunday, killing two people who appeared to be Palestinian bombers, Israeli police said.

Divers have connected 19 of 26 cables needed to lift the sunken nuclear submarine Kursk. Russian officials said they hope the vessel can be pulled to the surface today.

Tropical Storm Iris strengthened into a hurricane Saturday, triggering mudslides that killed three people in the Dominican Republic and lashing Haiti with winds and rains as it threatened to hit Jamaica.

Sports

After hitting homers 70 and 71 Friday night to break Mark McGwire's single-season record, Barry Bonds took a rest, pinch hitting in the Giant's 6-2 loss to the Los Angeles Dodgers Saturday.

Cal Ripken, Jr. turned in a lackluster 0-for-3 performance Saturday night, but the crowd still cheered wildly as Ripken played out his final game in the major leagues.

The Seattle Mariners matched a record held by the 1906 Chicago Cubs by winning their 116th game Saturday night, beating the Texas Rangers, 1-0.

The Indiana Pacers to Dennis Rodman: All jobs are filled. The seven-time NBA rebounding champion said he could be playing for the Pacers, but the team says otherwise.

Weather

Today: Partly cloudy with low temperatures in the upper 40s and high temperatures in the mid-60s.

Tomorrow: Partly cloudy with low temperatures in the upper 40s and high temperatures in the low 60s.

(Weather reports are based on an average of forecasts for Berlin, Germany and Warsaw, Poland.)



News Roundup

Solidarity builds, troops in position as time runs out

Almost all U.S. and allied air and ground forces are in place, setting the stage for an attack on Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, official sources said Saturday. President George W. Bush warned the Taliban that "time is running out" to surrender bin Laden or pay a "heavy price" for harboring the prime suspect in attacks on America.

The U.S. has launched the biggest U.S. military buildup since the 1991 Gulf War. U.S. and British aircraft carriers, more than 300 warplanes, ships armed with cruise missiles and special forces troops have gathered within striking range. About 30,000 troops have been deployed.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, a key ally in Bush's war on terrorism, said all plans were in place for a military strike, "although obviously the timing on any such action is a matter we must discuss with our close allies."

British commandos training in Oman Saturday could make up a large percentage of any strike force that launches attacks. Military planners make clear that any strikes against Afghanistan will only be the beginning of a long campaign.

U.S. officials were also making preparations for Army special operations forces to conduct hit-and-run raids inside Afghanistan in an effort to capture or kill bin Laden and members of the al-Qaida terrorism network.

President George W. Bush issued a warning in his weekly radio address that was the clearest indication yet the United States was poised to launch strikes not just against bin Laden but against the Taliban for not surrendering him.

White House officials said Bush was satisfied with the cooperation from a number of countries, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Oman, Qatar and the

United Arab Emirates. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze said on Friday he would allow his country's airports to be used as part of the war on terrorism.

On Saturday, about 1,000 members of the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, N.Y., arrived in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan's northern neighbor, in the first deployment ever of U.S. forces in the former Soviet Union. But Uzbek President Islam Karimov stressed that the U.S. forces in Uzbekistan could not be used to launch air or ground attacks against Afghanistan and said U.S. special operations soldiers would not be allowed in his country. Karimov said he had granted permission for U.S. forces to use an air base in his country for search-and-rescue missions in connection with a military campaign against bin Laden.

Taliban officials Saturday threatened to attack Uzbekistan if it allowed U.S. forces to attack Afghanistan from Uzbek territory.

Despite the continuing buildup, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld hinted before his arrival in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, that the campaign may involve less use of military force than is commonly assumed.

"It undoubtedly will prove to be a lot more like a cold war than a hot war," Rumsfeld said.

In a big blow to the Taliban, Blair stood side-by-side with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, once the Taliban's key ally, as both men discussed Friday what sort of government they would like to see in Afghanistan if the Taliban fell.

Meanwhile, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Friday that it's clear all nations of the world have come together to fight terrorism. There was almost universal solidarity with the United States except from Libya and Iraq, which accused the U.S. of state-sponsored terrorism.